

# HARRY K. THAW, 76, IS DEAD IN FLORIDA

**Coronary Thrombosis Fatal to  
Former 'Playboy' Who Shot  
Stanford White in 1906**

MIAMI BEACH, Fla., Feb. 22—Harry K. Thaw, 76, died at his Miami Beach home about 8 P. M. tonight.

His family physician said that the attack of coronary thrombosis he suffered a week ago had caused death.

The physician said he had "put up a pretty good fight but couldn't quite make the grade."

## In Limelight for Years

Harry K. Thaw, who was the central figure in one of the great causes célèbre in this county, was born to wealth but fated to much unsavory notoriety.

From the night of June 25, 1906, when he shot and killed Stanford White, the architect, on the roof of old Madison Square Garden, until he had reached an age when most men are satisfied to potter around their garden plots, Thaw was in the limelight. His insatiable appetite for sensations and his unbalanced ideas pitched him into trouble time and again, until his rather serious escapades became monotonous to the point of nausea.

As a younger man, indulgent persons had dubbed him the "playboy." Even the shooting of Stanford White was condoned by some, who pointed to the unwritten law. But latter-year scandals were not of the peccadillo type of his youth, when he rode cab horses down Broadway, fought with policemen and baited waiters in all-night cafes.

Unprepossessing in appearance, rather below middle height and wearing glasses, Thaw looked like a well-to-do business man. He had, however, had many flings, and he had spent a great deal of money on gay parties when he met Evelyn Nesbit, artist's model and chorus girl. He courted her and they were married on April 4, 1905.

## Never Regretted Incident

Never at any time did Thaw express regret at having killed Stanford White. Twenty years later, indeed, he said: "Under the same circumstances, I'd kill him tomorrow." Mr. White, a huge man physically, had no chance to defend himself. He was seated alone at a table, witnessing the performance of "Ma'mzelle Champagne," on the Madison Square Garden Roof. Thaw was there with his wife and two friends, and they started to leave before the play was over. Stopping suddenly opposite White's table, Thaw drew a revolver and fired three shots, the first killing White instantly.

The shooting caused a tremendous sensation, partly because of the fame of Mr. White as an architect and artist, and partly because of Thaw's reputation and great wealth. There was talk of a crime passionel, of justifiable homicide; the newspapers published whole pages of news and speculation as to the outcome of the case.

Judge William M. K. Olcott, Thaw's first defense counsel, pleaded temporary insanity, much to Thaw's disgust. Meanwhile Thaw's mother had returned in haste from Europe to give her financial support to her son. Evelyn Nesbit Thaw, for the sake of whom he claimed to have murdered White, stood by him, at least in the beginning. Thaw was furious and charged a conspiracy against him by his defense lawyers. He dismissed Judge Olcott and engaged the services of Delphin M. Delmas, a California attorney, who came to New York to manage the defense at a fee of \$50,000.

The first trial, during which a new term, "dementia Americana," was introduced as befitting Thaw, resulted in a disagreement among



HARRY K. THAW

Associated Press, 1938

the jury, after alienists had divided in their opinions as to Thaw's sanity.

Thaw demonstrated colossal vanity. He declared that the shooting of Stanford White was a "noble act," for which the community would thank him. Prominent alienists swore that he suffered from delusional insanity, that he was a paranoiac of the most dangerous type.

## Verdict of "Not Guilty"

The second trial opened on Jan. 6, 1908, before Justice Victor J. Dowling. William Travers Jerome, the District Attorney, who conducted the prosecution at the first trial, was again the prosecutor, but on this occasion the defense counsel was Martin W. Littleton. Evidence was submitted by the defense to show that there had been insanity in the Thaw family, and that Thaw had inherited the taint. The verdict was "not guilty," on the ground that Thaw had been insane at the time he committed the crime.

Thaw's triumph was short-lived, however, for he was committed to the Matteawan State Hospital for the Criminal Insane. For some time Thaw attempted to obtain his release by means of habeas corpus proceedings, but was unsuccessful.

Then came another great sensation. On the night of Aug. 17, 1913, he escaped from Matteawan through collusion with one of the keepers. The escape was perfectly planned and carried out. He eluded his pursuers and was next seen in Canada. On Aug. 18 he was in the little border town of Coaticook, Quebec. There was a tendency to make a hero of the millionaire fugitive up there, and he engaged the services of some of the most eminent Canadian lawyers to resist extradition.

Mr. Jerome, who hastened to the new scene of action, was arrested on a charge of gambling. It was shown that he had indulged in a harmless game of penny ante, and Justice Mulvena of Sherbrooke gave him an honorable acquittal and an apology from the bench.

The case was scheduled for hearing in the Superior Court in Montreal, when suddenly, by order of the Canadian Government, Thaw was virtually kidnapped by Canadian immigration officials, whisked into an automobile and taken across the border into Vermont and New Hampshire.

## Put Up a Wild Fight

The "playboy" had put up a wild fight, hurling a bottle at one of the immigration men, but he was subdued and told to be on his way, and for a few hours he was a free man until arrested by a Sheriff in New Hampshire. For a long time he was held at Concord, N. H., where the authorities were puzzled as to how to act. Finally a special commission ruled that he was sane, but the United States Supreme Court ruled that New Hampshire

must return him to New York, where he would face charges of conspiracy in connection with his escape from Matteawan.

After two more trials Thaw was finally acquitted and freed on July 16, 1915, when a jury formally declared him sane. More than ten years after the crime, the last chapter seemed to have been written in the turbulent history of Harry Thaw, but this was by no means so.

After his final acquittal, Thaw went to California. Trouble came soon enough. He met Fred Gump Jr., a high school student and son of a well-to-do Kansas City manufacturer. Thaw took an especial interest in the lad, and the two came to New York at Christmas time, 1916. Thaw was accused of horse-whipping the boy, and he was indicted on that charge. He escaped to Philadelphia, and there he was found with his throat slashed on Jan. 11, 1917. The wound, inflicted by himself, was not serious, however. He was found insane by the courts and was committed to an asylum, where he spent seven years. In April, 1924, he was again declared sane and was allowed his freedom. The Gump case was settled with the family by Thaw's mother.

Although at times strained, the relations between himself and his wife were cordial for many years, until they were finally divorced. In 1926 Thaw had published (at his own expense) a book which he called "The Traitor," meant to be a vindication of Evelyn Nesbit and an explanation of his own deeds.

Born on Feb. 1, 1871, Harry Kendall Thaw was a son of William Thaw, an official of the Pennsylvania Railroad at Pittsburgh, and the latter's second wife, Mary Copley Thaw. He was one of eleven children of his father's two marriages. Young Thaw was educated in Pittsburgh schools and at the Western University (now the University of Pittsburgh). In 1893 his father died and left him \$3,000,000 as well as an interest in coke producing properties, which gave him a large additional annual income.

From 1935 until 1939, when he bought the Philadelphia home of the late J. Bertram Lippincott, Thaw constantly moved about the country, living in various homes in California, Pittsburgh, New York and Winchester, Va. His last attempt to gain the spotlight was in 1940, when he opened the Philadelphia brownstone mansion on Spruce Street and invited the city out to do homage.